



The **i** Factor

HOW BUILDING A
GREAT RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF
IS THE KEY TO A
HAPPY, SUCCESSFUL LIFE

VAN MOODY

Author of *THE PEOPLE FACTOR*

Praise for *The I-Factor*

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“By helping us to find ourselves, Pastor Van Moody leads us to stop making excuses and blaming others, and take personal responsibility for who we become and who we are called to be.”

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“Getting ahead, achieving greatness, and fulfilling God’s purpose for our lives begin with knowing who we are and why we’re here. Van Moody helps us to discover those things in *The I-Factor*. I highly recommend reading this book!”

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“I found this book refreshing, enlightening, and inspiring.”

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“Establishing the order from the inside out will definitely help bring the healing we need as individuals, as the kingdom, as the church, and as a country! Thank you, Van Moody, for this amazing body of work!”

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THE I-FACTOR

HOW BUILDING A GREAT RELATIONSHIP
WITH YOURSELF IS THE KEY TO A
HAPPY, SUCCESSFUL LIFE

VAN MOODY



NELSON
BOOKS

An Imprint of Thomas Nelson

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ISBN 978-0-7180-7758-7 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Moody, Van, 1975- author.

Title: The I factor : how building a great relationship with yourself is the key to a happy, successful life / Van Moody.

Description: Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016008305 | ISBN 9780718077563

Subjects: LCSH: Self--Religious aspects--Christianity.

Classification: LCC BT713 .M66 2016 | DDC 248.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016008305>

The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

—1 SAMUEL 16:7

To my amazing wife and beautiful daughter and son

*To the Worship Center Christian Church: the
wonderful people I get to do life with*

To everyone who desires successful living from the inside out

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Introduction

ON JUNE 25, 2009, THE DEATH OF MICHAEL JACKSON shocked the world. Without warning, one of the world's most popular recording artists was gone, his unmistakable voice silenced at the age of fifty. His passing sent a surge of disbelief and sadness across the country and around the world. People simply could not believe he was gone and immediately began asking, "What happened?"

I would venture to say Michael Jackson was universally acknowledged as a brilliant entertainer, but he was also regarded as eccentric and seemed content to live with an air of mystery. Questions and controversy sometimes surrounded him, but his talent was tremendous and his unforgettable songs were phenomenal successes. Within certain age groups, you could go almost anywhere in the world and find someone to quote lyrics from "Billie Jean" or "Man in the Mirror."

Before the world fully absorbed the shock of Jackson's passing, another piece of news emerged, one that was even harder to believe: His death was not the result of a random accident or some undisclosed illness. It was the result of an overdose of medication prescribed to help him sleep. People immediately began asking why. If they thought about it very long, they might have realized that not being able to sleep is often rooted in some type of internal torment. At a basic physiological level, it's the inability to find peace and rest. Michael Jackson, a musical icon about to embark

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on a world tour, seemed to have it all in many ways. Why couldn't he sleep at night?

While I cannot comment on the specifics of Jackson's situation, I don't think any external circumstances led to his demise; I think what caused him to take a lethal dose of sleeping medication was a problem in an often-overlooked dynamic I call the I-factor. Let me explain.

When I refer to Jackson's I-factor, I am talking about his relationship with himself—apart from all the applause and accolades he received from the public and apart from the affection he experienced in private relationships with friends and family. Jackson's enormous audience knew him as a great entertainer and, from all appearances, as a sensitive and generous human being. They knew his public persona, but they also had glimpses of a troubled life beneath his designer clothes, hats, and sunglasses. He had earned great fame and prestigious awards. But underneath those trappings, he was miserable—so miserable that he reached a point where he could not even sleep. And so his I-factor issues robbed his family of a son and a brother, his children of a father, and the world of one of the greatest entertainers of my lifetime.

Jackson's struggles were not unique, not by a long shot. Throughout history, people with remarkable talent or impressive positions have come to surprising and terrible ends—people like the singer Amy Winehouse, actor Heath Ledger, writer Ernest Hemingway, painter Vincent van Gogh, and the ancient Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. Clearly, an inability to manage success is a problem with a long history and a challenge that still threatens people today.

The common denominator between Jackson and these others is that all of them had achieved great success—or were solidly on the path to great success—but for some reason crashed and burned. I believe the problem lies in the I-factor.

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The connection in the stories of these individuals is that some personal weakness took them from the pinnacle of success to total disgrace. While their scandals were public, what led to each scandal was deeply private. None of these individuals can blame their downfalls on anyone else; each was solely responsible. The specific contributing element to the downfall was different in each situation, but it was always something unrelated to his or her intelligence, personality, abilities, or fame and fortune. The reason was something deeply personal and private: something was faulty in their relationships with themselves.

Maybe you cannot relate to people with such fame, fortune, and perceived success, but you know exactly what I mean when I talk about people who have a longing to succeed but keep tripping themselves up. Maybe that's exactly what's happening to you. You have desires, goals, abilities, initiative, motivation, energy, and solid plans. You have all the right credentials, and to any casual observer you are positioned to succeed. From the outside looking in, there's no reason you shouldn't be able to live your dreams. Yet you make a certain amount of progress down the path of your potential, and then something happens. You get derailed. It's happened enough times to become a pattern, and your greatest source of frustration is that you simply cannot put your finger on the problem. Maybe the problem seems different every time it happens, and that only adds to your confusion. I have great news for you: this book will help you identify the problem, understand it, and solve it, removing the obstacles that have hindered the success you long for and the greatness that awaits you.

So what exactly is the I-factor? I will explain it in greater detail as this book unfolds, but in a nutshell, it's how people think about themselves, feel about themselves, and relate to themselves. It's a combination of dynamics that converge to form the totality of a person's relationship with him- or herself. It's more than self-worth

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or self-respect. It goes beyond matters of character and motives. It reaches past a sense of significance or a perception of purpose. It does include relational skills with other people, but it has *everything* to do with one's relationship with oneself. It's about managing yourself—and your whole life—well.

Of course, I-factor problems are not limited to the world's rich and famous. Ordinary people face the same struggles every day. The problem with the I-factor is that it's so internal. It's often a massive personal struggle, well camouflaged by talents and abilities, personality and charisma, or accomplishments. We shouldn't be deceived by the cover-up; almost everyone struggles with the I-factor in silence, with as much anonymity as possible. No one seems to want anyone else to know how difficult and brutal the fight can be, which is a shame because so many people are in it.

In my book *The People Factor*, I wrote: "Every relationship you have influences your life. *There are no neutral relationships*. Each one lifts you up or weighs you down. It moves you forward or holds you back. It helps you or it hurts you."¹ All these statements are true, and I believe them as strongly today as ever. I also understand a parallel truth about relationships: it's your relationship with yourself that trumps every other association in your life. Everything I believe about the power of relationships with others, I believe even more about your relationship with yourself. It can be the most dangerous relationship you ever have, or the most awesome one. It is the difference-maker between success and failure. No one can derail your destiny as quickly or effectively as you can. However, no one can position you for success and for the fulfillment of your dreams as well as you can.

The three ingredients for your best possible life are a great relationship with God, a great relationship with yourself, and great relationships with others. I've written at length about your external relationships in *The People Factor*. In *The I-Factor*, I'm writing

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about your internal relationship. If your relationships with God and others are healthy and you also have a strong, positive relationship with yourself, you will be unstoppable. There will be no limits to what you can achieve and who you can become.

Over the past few years, I have been astounded by stories of people who could not manage some aspect of their lives and ended up dying young or in public disgrace. My goal in *The I-Factor* is to put a stop to the sad stories of defeat and help people become the main characters in their own success stories. In this book, I hope to rip away the veil of secrecy covering people's deepest and most intimate struggles in such a way that those struggles ultimately give way to personal victories. I want to help people see beneath the surface of their lives so they can understand the source of their greatest struggles, deal with the ways those struggles impact their lives, avoid the personal disasters their struggles may lead to, and ultimately live their dreams. I believe many people ask themselves more often than they admit, "How do I deal with myself?" and I've written this book to help answer that question. I'm convinced that winning the battle with the I-factor may be the most important step in bringing about personal wholeness, security, and success.

Winning the battle with the I-factor takes a proper understanding of three dynamics: identity, significance, and perspective. You'll see these words mentioned, explained, and elaborated on throughout the book. They are all necessary to a healthy relationship with yourself and foundational to the development of a strong I-factor. When you understand your identity, you know who you are, and that's the foundation of everything. When you understand your significance, you get in touch with the purpose and the greatness for which you were created. When you understand perspective, you can view the problems you face as stepping-stones to greatness instead of stumbling blocks. The right perspective will enable you

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to walk across difficulties to your destiny instead of allowing them to stop you in your tracks.

Are you tired of working toward personal or professional success and falling short? Are you frustrated over the little things that seem to trip you up on the path to your fullest potential? Are you wondering, deep down inside, if some of these things may have more to do with your relationship with yourself than with circumstances or people around you? Do you ever find yourself asking, “What am I doing wrong? Why can’t I ever seem to make it?” Or, do you simply want to learn how to live your best life by removing all the potential obstacles that may arise so you can pursue your destiny with wisdom?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, chances are there’s more going on inside of you than your appearance or persona would indicate, and as you continue reading this book, you’ll find yourself on an amazing journey of hope. I have written it with the profound conviction that you are destined for greatness and that the practical principles and biblical truths in this book will help you get there. This book can change your life for the better, and that’s exactly what I am believing for you.

More Than Meets the Eye

If you want to be truly successful, invest in yourself to get the knowledge you need to find your unique factor. When you find it and focus on it and persevere your success will blossom.

—SYDNEY MADWED

“IT’S BEEN EIGHTY-FOUR YEARS,” RESCUED PASSENGER Rose DeWitt Bukater reminisced in the movie *Titanic*, “and I can still smell the fresh paint. The china had never been used. The sheets had never been slept in. *Titanic* was called the ‘Ship of Dreams.’ And it was. It really was.”¹

I’m sure you have heard about the majestic passenger ship, *Titanic*. It was the finest vessel of its day—larger, faster, and better equipped than any other. It boasted all the engineering and shipbuilding expertise of the times and every luxury its wealthy travelers were accustomed to. The ship had been called unsinkable, and no doubt those aboard felt safe, pampered, and privileged.

If ever a ship seemed destined for success, it was the *Titanic*. No one could have possibly imagined that *this* ship would go down. It would go down in history, for sure, they must have thought, because it was such an excellent vessel, but they were also convinced it could withstand any challenge it met at sea. An employee of the *Titanic*’s

parent company, the White Star Line, said, “Not even God himself could sink this ship.”²

But at 11:40 p.m. on Sunday, April 14, 1912, only five days into its voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City, the *Titanic*'s lookout sent an urgent message to the bridge: “Iceberg, right ahead.” Less than forty seconds later, the ship hit the iceberg. Within three hours, the celebrated vessel rested at the bottom of the frigid Atlantic Ocean, and more than fifteen hundred lives were lost.³

The lookouts in the crow's nest did not have binoculars. Had a simple pair of binoculars been available, someone could have seen the iceberg ahead, and one of the greatest tragedies in maritime history might have been avoided. As it happened that day, the time elapsed between the first sighting of the iceberg and the ship's impact was a little more than thirty seconds.⁴ Here's my point: the *Titanic* sank not because the iceberg was in the ocean, but *because no one saw it in time to steer clear of it.*

As I researched the iceberg the *Titanic* hit, I saw varying statistics about its size. One source said the iceberg was estimated to have been about six hundred feet long, with five hundred feet of it below the ocean's surface and one hundred feet visible above the water. I also learned that typically, seven-eighths of an iceberg is underwater, which means slightly more than 10 percent of an enormous mass of ice would be visible to a captain or a ship's crew.⁵ Where icebergs are concerned, what's under the surface, invisible to the naked eye, does much more damage than the part of the iceberg people can easily see. This was certainly true for the *Titanic*.

Believe it or not, the story of the *Titanic* and the theme of this book, the I-factor, have a lot in common. Let me explain. Many people in the world have all the trappings of success. Like the *Titanic*, they are decked out with everything the world finds impressive. They not only have good looks, designer clothes, the best car, and

the right address, they also have a sterling educational pedigree, a broad social and professional network, strong skills, and a bright mind. Everything about them seems destined to succeed—just like the *Titanic*. If there were ever any sure bets for success, they would be on these people.

But sometimes these people crash and burn—and no one understands why. The reason is that the world places such high value on who we are on the outside and pays little attention to who we are on the inside. To use the metaphor of an iceberg, it's what's under the surface that can sink a person's whole life, not what's visible to others. The totality of the difference between success and failure is not in any degree we obtain, position we hold, label we wear, car we drive, or amount of money we have. The difference is what's on the inside of a person, who he or she really is at the core, underneath all the trappings and accessories of success. It's those internal dynamics that will cause us to sail or to sink as we go through life. While relationships with other people are vitally important, your relationship with yourself, which is part of what the I-factor is all about, is even more important.

The *I* in *Lie*

How does the I-factor precipitate a person's downfall? One of the stories that best illustrates my point happened to a man you probably have heard of. In 2007, he was named one of *Time* magazine's most influential people in the world. He was the National Father of the Year in 1996. He's appeared on *Sesame Street*, *Saturday Night Live*, the Olympics, and *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, just to cite a fraction of his television experience. This man has won twelve Emmy awards, and as of December 2014, his salary was ten million dollars per year. His personal brand seemed untouchable and his celebrity credentials were strong. Just three months later, in February 2015,

he was suspended from his job without pay and had lost not only his influence, but his credibility too. I'm sure you know who I'm describing, former NBC news anchor Brian Williams.

Williams was part of a fairly exclusive lineage. At one time in the United States, before the days of cable news, the most powerful voices in media belonged to the men who occupied the anchor chairs at the big three networks: ABC, CBS, and NBC. With recognizable voices and just the right amount of gravitas, they were media kings. When they reported the news of the day, people believed them. People had no reason not to believe them. Viewed as trustworthy American icons, they held the public trust for decades.

When Brian Williams ascended to the helm of *NBC Nightly News* in December 2004, the evening news anchor job was still admirable and considered quite an accomplishment, even though by then a host of other news broadcasts had joined the big three. Williams quickly became one of America's favorite news anchors, a popular and reliable source for the important information and stories of each day, and he typically outscored his competitors in the rankings of evening news broadcasts. By all appearances, he had reached the pinnacle of success. Had he chosen to do so, he should have been able to cruise his way into retirement from his seat behind the evening news desk. The respect he had gained in about ten years was his to lose—and lose it he did. Big time.

While relationships with other people are vitally important, your relationship with yourself, which is part of what the I-factor is all about, is even more important.

He did not lose it over a major scandal or some type of serious journalistic error. He lost it because somewhere in the midst of all his fame and fortune, he was not satisfied. He wanted more—more acclaim, more oohs and aahs, perhaps a chance to show a little

more bravado on the television screen. In the quest for even more than he already had, he told a lie. Actually, he told several lies, but the one that really got him in trouble was that he had been in Iraq in 2003, riding in a helicopter that came under heavy enemy fire and was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

I assume the world would have believed him had crewmembers who *were* in the helicopter that was hit not called his bluff in *Stars and Stripes*. That was the beginning of the end for Williams at the anchor desk. After six months of suspension, NBC gave the anchor job to Lester Holt and relegated Williams to the position of breaking news anchor on MSNBC and breaking news anchor for NBC live special reports, a significant demotion to say the least.

Why?

Many people have questioned why Williams embellished his story. From the moment I first heard about it, I could make only one assumption: the reason had something to do with his I-factor. I did not know all the details or realize he would ultimately admit that the helicopter story, and others that were also embellished, were “clearly ego driven,” and born of “*the desire to better my role in a story I was already in*” (emphasis added).⁶

A quote from the website Politico characterizes the situation accurately: “You’d think that Brian Williams, a mega-successful, handsome, funny, high-status millionaire journalist wouldn’t need laurels beyond the ones he’s already collected. You’d be wrong.”⁷ The Politico writer instinctively understood that what Williams did left much of America scratching our collective head, totally baffled.

I mention this story because of its shock value and its connection to the I-factor. People all over America and even around the world were stunned that a US media darling could fall so far, so fast. They were even more stunned that the wound to his career and

his character was self-inflicted. I cannot count the number of times I read or heard someone say, “Why would he do this to himself?” The incredulity in our country was palpable for days after the story broke. As a culture, no matter how many times we witness it, we still marvel at the way people sabotage themselves.

When we orchestrate our own demise or our own delays on the road to success, we try to explain it away. Sometimes, though, those explanations are faulty because our insights into our own souls are not as sharp and clear as they should be; they are dulled and clouded by our desire to view ourselves in the most positive ways, instead of the most honest ways. These personal struggles, along with our continued bafflement over why other people do what they do, all happen for the same reason: we do not yet fully understand the I-factor.

What’s the Problem?

How many times have you heard a shocking story similar to the one about Brian Williams—when someone in your community, your country, or the world seemed to have it all together and then, to the amazement of most people, suffered a tragic fall? These types of scenarios surprise and confuse us. Depending on the situation, one question floods our minds: How could this have happened? Then we go on to tell ourselves that the person who crashed and burned was so smart, so good looking, so funny, so talented, so strong, so prosperous, or so savvy—whatever adjective applies. This kind of thinking is so common in America that I’m not sure we realize how problematic it is.

We have a tendency to assess and esteem people based on their external qualities. We look at their tangible assets, such as educational credentials, physical attractiveness, financial strength (or apparent financial strength, which may be nothing more than debt), professional experience, social position, or worldly influence,

and we assume these people are successful. We also look at their intangible qualities, such as personality or charisma and intelligence, believing these attributes make people successful.

We take the same approach toward ourselves. When we struggle to get the job we want; the relationship we want; the influence we want; or the house, car, or designer clothes we want, we immediately try to fix something external. We go back to school; we get another certification; we find a mentor; we lose weight and get in shape; we moonlight until we have enough extra money to buy the possessions we think will make us feel better about ourselves. Sooner or later, though, we realize that none of those things solved our real problem. They may have provided some temporary relief, but when we look in the mirror each day, we still see the same person wrestling with the same challenges.

While external factors do contribute to success in certain ways, none of them and no combination of them form the bedrock for a successful life. They can take people part of the way toward true success, but they can't keep them there. In order to attain and experience genuine success, the I-factor is another element that must be involved. It's often a silent partner in the formula for success; it's also the most important one. It may be something you have never considered and no one has ever told you about.

The I-factor is as intensely personal a matter as there can be. It affects your relationships with others, but it is the basis of everything about your relationship with yourself. It's completely unrelated to everything a person has working for him on the outside; it's all about what's happening on the inside—thoughts, emotions, motives, self-talk. It's the foundation of the way you relate to yourself. While self-esteem and self-respect are closely related to the I-factor, they don't encompass all of it. The I-factor also includes a person's innate integrity. It's the often unseen "why" behind what you think, say, and do. It's a combination of internal dynamics that

forms your identity, shapes your character, and influences your life far more than you may realize.

Think again about Brian Williams. His lie about being in a helicopter under enemy fire was not the biggest problem. The biggest problem was whatever was happening inside of him that caused him to tell that lie and others. A person with a weak or negative I-factor would understandably lie in that way—because something on the inside felt deficient. In Williams’s case, as he admitted, he wanted “to better [his]role in a story [he] was already in.”⁸ So that’s part of the story behind the story, part of the psychological explanation for what he did. But the question that leads us to I-factor issues is this: *Why* did he want to better himself, as good as he already was? The answer is that deep inside he still felt lacking—not good enough—in some way. None of the acclaim or fame or fortune was enough to empower him to see himself as many others saw him. They saw him as nearly perfect; he saw himself as needing to beef up a story so he would seem better. That’s an I-factor problem.

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Though we seem to be hearing about more and more such situations on the news websites these days, I-factor problems are not new. They stretch back for centuries, at least as far as the Old Testament, in the story of two young men I will share later in this chapter.

You Are the Key to Your Success

Often, when people fail to reach their goals, fall short of achieving their destinies, or tumble from a place of position or prominence,

they quickly begin playing a blame game. Almost immediately, they find a reason that things did not work out as they had hoped. Usually, it's something like this:

- “Well, that opportunity didn’t work out for me because that company never hires people from the school I went to.”
- “I didn’t get the job because of my gender.”
- “I ended up with this addiction because I needed something to numb the pain of my past.”
- “My marriage fell apart because my parents were divorced and they did not teach me the relational skills I needed.”
- “I’m deep in debt because of all the designer clothes and the car I had to buy in order to make a good impression on my coworkers.”
- “I never finished school because I couldn’t get the grants I needed.”
- “I’m overweight because I have to cook for my kids and they won’t eat anything healthy.”

I have heard people blame their problems and shortcomings on everything from their parents to their children to the government to race, age, or gender, or to the neighborhood where they grew up.

When disappointments or troubles happen to Christians, they often blame the enemy, making comments such as, “The devil is trying to steal my destiny!” or, “I’m under attack from the enemy! He’s hindering my success!” While I am quick to affirm the reality of spiritual warfare, I also think spiritual warfare is cited as the reason for many things that have absolutely nothing to do with the spiritual realm.

The hard but absolutely transformative truth of the I-factor is

THE I-FACTOR

that, more often than not, no person, no organization, and no situation is responsible for what happens in our lives. Almost always, something within us as individuals is what causes our greatest frustrations. Many times, we are our own worst enemies. The good news is that as we resolve our I-factor issues, we become our own best friends and biggest helpers.

Are You Your Own Worst Enemy or Your Own Best Friend?

The I-factor ultimately determines whether we will help ourselves or hinder ourselves as we go through life. People with weak, negative I-factors become their own worst enemies, while people with healthy, positive I-factors end up being their own best friends. The following table compares the mind-sets and behaviors of those who sabotage themselves and become their own worst enemies with those who position themselves for success:

PEOPLE WHO SABOTAGE THEMSELVES	PEOPLE WHO POSITION THEMSELVES FOR SUCCESS
Allow their egos to get in the way of everything else	Are secure in who they are, yet humble
Refuse to take advice or receive help	Seek and implement good advice from others
Criticize themselves	Accept themselves
Cannot manage their anger, greed, jealousy, lust, or other negative emotions	Know how to manage anger, greed, envy, sexual temptation, and other potentially negative emotions in healthy ways
Fear failure	Are not afraid of failure, but are eager to learn from it

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Will not try again after they make mistakes	Always try again if they do not succeed at first
Lack self-confidence	Have healthy self-esteem and an appropriate measure of self-confidence
Won't pay the price necessary to achieve success	Work hard and pay the price for success
Are not content with what they have while they try to better themselves	Are satisfied with what they have and will work for something better
Will not take responsibility for their lives	Take responsibility for their thoughts, feelings, words, and behaviors
Are negative and fault-finding, frequently blaming others for their own shortcomings	Are optimistic and positive
Allow other people to use them	Are willing to help others, but will not allow themselves to be used
Are overly eager to please	Care more about preserving their integrity than pleasing people
Will not take risks	Are willing to take appropriate risks
Have unrealistic expectations	Set expectations that are reasonable and realistic
Are willing to compromise their integrity to get what they want	Will not compromise their character, even if it means not getting what they want
Have talents or abilities, but not character or discipline	Make sure their character and integrity co-exist with their gifts and abilities
Do not know how to deal with pain and disappointment in a healthy way	Deal with pain and disappointment in healthy ways

The Little Letter That Makes a Big Difference

My study of the I-factor started with the fascinating but sad story of two young men whose lives came to a tragic end. Their names were Hophni and Phinehas, and they were the sons of Eli, a priest in Israel. This means they, too, were priests, but as we will see, they only served the Lord externally; they held no honor for Him in their hearts.

The first insight Scripture gives us into these two men and the disconnect between what they did outwardly and who they were inwardly is in 1 Samuel 2:12 (HCSB): “Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament: NIV* notes that the word *wicked* means “worthless” and “good for nothing.”⁹ In other words, no matter what they did or who they were with, they brought no value to the situation. To further understand this verse, we see that in the *NIV Study Bible*, the annotation to this verse explains that “had no regard for the Lord” literally means “did not know.” It goes on to say: “In Old Testament usage, to ‘know’ the Lord is not just intellectual or theoretical recognition. To know the Lord is to enter into fellowship with him and acknowledge his claims on one’s life. The term often has a covenantal connotation.”¹⁰ Based on this explanation, we can assume Hophni and Phinehas were estranged from God and uninterested in the things of God, even though they were priests. We also know that they were greedy, irreverent, and involved in sexual sin (1 Sam. 2:12–17, 22), serious I-factor issues.

Even their names point to the fact that they were not dedicated to the ways of the Lord. Hophni means “fist-fighter” and Phinehas means “mouth of a serpent.”¹¹ Any time anyone called these men by their names, that person was reinforcing these negative descriptions of them. To the worshippers in the temple, Hophni and Phinehas may have appeared to be successful in their responsibilities of

serving the Lord, but they clearly had many faults and weaknesses. Their private failures undermined their public success.

After the description of Hophni and Phinehas, we are told a prophet visited their father, Eli, with strong words spoken on God's behalf: "Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?" (1 Sam. 2:29). The prophet concluded his message with these chilling words: "And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day" (v. 34, emphasis added).

Sure enough, on a tragic and dramatic day, both Hophni and Phinehas died in a battle that ensued when the Philistines slaughtered many Israelites and captured the ark of God (1 Sam. 4:10–11). At that time, Eli was ninety-eight years old and when a messenger told him all that had happened, he fell backward out of his chair, broke his neck, and died (vv. 17–18).

At the time this happened, Phinehas's wife was pregnant. When she heard that the ark had been captured and that Phinehas, Hophni, and Eli were all dead, she went into labor. According to Scripture, she "was overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, 'Don't despair; you have given birth to a son.' But she did not respond or pay any attention" (vv. 19–20). Before she died, however, Phinehas's wife "named the boy Ichabod, saying, 'The Glory has departed from Israel'—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, 'The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured'" (vv. 21–22).

To further understand the significance of Ichabod's name, it's important to also understand the meaning of the word *chabod*, without the *I*. In Hebrew, *chabod* is the opposite of *Ichabod*. *Chabod* refers to the full weight or splendor of God's glory.¹² The word *glory*, especially in its Old Testament sense, seems old-fashioned

and outdated in our current day, but the modern definition of *glory* is this: “public praise, honor, and fame; something that brings praise or fame to someone or something; something that is a source of great pride.”¹³ Based on this definition, it’s reasonable to say that whatever we view as “success” is our “glory.” It’s what earns us public praise, honor, and recognition; it’s something in which we take pride. With that in mind, let’s think again about Ichabod.

The difference between *Ichabod*, meaning “no glory” and *chabod*, meaning “the full measure of glory” is one tiny letter—the letter *I*. That’s the letter that changes everything. In biblical times, it made the difference between glory and no glory. Today, it makes the difference between success and failure, not because of its connection to those words, but because of the person to whom it applies. Almost always, the difference between victory and defeat in life is “I.” The ability to succeed or not resides within us. Yes, there are times when other people help us succeed or when circumstances seem to fall into place perfectly, setting us up for the breakthroughs we need. And yes, there are times God moves on our behalf in astonishing ways to help us get where we need to be. But generally speaking, success rises and falls on each individual who pursues it. One of the truths of life, although it can be painful, is this: we are often the greatest hindrances to our success and the greatest barriers to everything God wants to do in and through our lives. That’s what the I-factor is all about.

The I-Factor: It Must Be Dealt With

One of the biggest problems in our society is that so few people recognize or acknowledge the I-factor. Everybody has one, but many people don’t realize that. In some people, it’s positive; in some it’s negative. In some people, it’s weak; in others it’s strong. For most

people, though, it's a struggle because it goes unnoticed and therefore unaddressed. It's like a stealth bomber that wreaks havoc in a person's life, while the person has no idea the bomber is even in flight.

As far back as Hophni and Phinehas's day, people have been clueless about the I-factor and about how much it has to do with what happens to them. In the case of the two brothers, Israel was at war with its enemy, the Philistines. At one point in the battle, the Israelites kept asking, "Why? Why are we being defeated?" They did not recognize their greatest weakness—that God was not with them. Even worse, they did not realize the reason He was not with them was because of the I-factor issues of the priests, Hophni and Phinehas. The Israelites thought simply regaining the ark of the covenant would be enough to guarantee their victory. It wasn't—because doing the right things externally is never sufficient. In fact, the Israelites were defeated long before the battle even started because their leaders never addressed their I-factor issues.

In many ways, life is a battle, just as real as any military conflict. People wrestle with financial issues, relational issues, bad habits and addictions, poor choices, trying to get ahead personally and professionally, and a host of other challenges that everyday life presents. Like it or not, in order to succeed we have to fight. We have to fight external enemies, but we also have to fight the internal forces that cause us to sabotage ourselves.

In order to win the battles necessary to succeed in life, we have to start with three things. First, we need to recognize the I-factor. We need to realize that not every hindrance, delay, or challenge we face is external. Some of them—some of the most potent—are internal. Second, we need to deal with the weaknesses and negative aspects of our own I-factors. This may not be a quick-and-easy process, but the rewards will be tremendous. Third, we need to replace

the faulty elements of our I-factors with strong, healthy ingredients. As we do this, we turn the things that hinder us into things that will help us.

I believe you are destined for so much more than you are currently experiencing. I am convinced your life can be so much better than it is now, and so much better than you have ever imagined. I know you have many gifts, skills, talents, and dreams just waiting to take you to the next level of greatness. No doubt, you have many of your externals in order, but perhaps you know deep down that something—something you cannot perceive clearly and may not be able to articulate, but you know it's there—is holding you back from the life you long for. There's a good chance that "something" is related to the I-factor. This book will help you resolve your I-factor issues so you can experience all the greatness for which you were created.

Internal Building Blocks

- True success is not dependent on external resources or evident in the so-called external trappings of success. It comes from what's inside you.
- The most important relationship you will ever have in your life is the relationship you have with yourself.
- The way you manage yourself internally determines whether you become your own best friend or your own worst enemy, whether you help yourself or hinder yourself on the journey to success.
- Three secrets to success are to recognize your own I-factor and understand the importance of a healthy relationship with yourself, deal with your internal issues and struggles, and work to replace weak aspects of your I-factor with strong ones.

Strengthening Your I-Factor

1. Based on this chapter, what does the I-factor mean to you?
2. How would you describe your relationship with yourself?
3. Why is your I-factor your most important key to success?
4. What do you believe to be your most significant I-factor weakness and how can you strengthen and improve it? (Please see chart on pages 10–12.)
5. What do you believe to be your biggest I-factor strength and how can you use it to take yourself to a new level of success and greatness? (Please see chart on pages 10–12.)



2

It's Time to Peel the Onion

*Success in any endeavor depends on the degree
to which it is an expression of your true self.*

—RALPH MARSTON

THE ISSUE OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IS A HUGE COMPONENT of anyone's I-factor. Everything you think, everything you do, and the entire way you see and relate to yourself flows from your sense of identity—your personal assessment of who you are and why you are significant. Your identity is the compass that guides you through every aspect of your life and keeps you grounded and centered in the things that matter most to you.

When people are not secure in their identities, they waste much of their time in efforts to fulfill the unreasonable expectations that others have placed on them. Many individuals have crashed and burned not because of their own inabilities or weaknesses, but because they have tried to be something they were not in an effort to please people who never should have had so much influence in their lives.

Trying to please or impress other people, or to live up to their expectations, is exhausting and frustrating. People rarely succeed at it because when they do it, they suppress and deny their true selves as they pretend to be smarter, wealthier, more attractive,

more charismatic, more gifted, or more connected than they really believe themselves to be. If they only knew how valuable they actually are, they could save so much energy, be so much more authentic, and enjoy life so much more.

The process of discovering your personal identity is one of the most rewarding journeys you will ever take. It's not easy, but when you begin to find out and tap into who you really are, apart from all the trappings of your life, I believe the results will invigorate you, empower you, and take your breath away. I liken this process of self-discovery to an activity we're all familiar with—the peeling of an onion.

When you peel an onion, you remove one layer at a time until you get to the core of the onion, which began as an onion seed. Just as the onion started with a seed, you also started as a seed, biologically speaking, the seed of life. That seed carried everything about you, and the unique DNA code of who you are—your identity—was in it. Over time, many layers have piled on top of that unique identity, layers of experience, layers of fear, layers of disappointment, and layers of so many other things. Getting back to the core of who you are, the seed, allows you to live from the healthy place of your true identity.

You figure out who you really are and why you are so valuable one discovery at a time. Often, before you get down to the core of who you really are, you first have to strip away who you are not. Just like peeling an onion can sting your eyes and stink up your kitchen, uncovering your true identity can be messy and painful. Just as there are times you have to step away from the onion because your eyes are watering so profusely, there will be times you have to back off on your journey of discovery because it's so intense. I don't pretend that the process is easy, but I promise that it's a supremely worthwhile endeavor. Failure to do it will forever bind you to the emptiness of trying to define yourself according to what you do in life instead of who you are, to what someone did to you or said about

you, to circumstances beyond your control, or to what has happened in your past. But if you'll do the work of finding out who you really are, it will shape and shift your entire life in all the best ways.

Your Identity Is Not Based on What You Do

Bible teacher Joyce Meyer has a well-known quotation that summarizes identity in just a few words: "You must separate your *do* from your *who*."¹ In other words, who you are is totally separate from what you do. Your identity comes from God and is revealed in His Word. Yet many people are unaware of this truth, so they go through life defining themselves in terms of their accomplishments or activities instead of their internal realities. As an example, think about how many times you have overheard a conversation like this:

"Hi, I'm John."

"Hi, John. I'm Darrell. Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you, too, Darrell. Tell me about yourself."

"Well, I'm an accountant and a running enthusiast."

John might then respond with the fact that he is an engineer and a guitarist in his spare time.

At the end of a conversation like this, both men end up finding out what the other one *does*, but they know little about who the other one *is*. Unfortunately, much of our social system in the United States is built on knowing what people do, not on who they are. This happens not only in relationships with others, it also happens in our relationships with ourselves. Because we find it easier to focus on our actions than on our inner beings, we default to talking about who we are in terms of

You figure out who you really are and why you are so valuable one discovery at a time. Often, before you get down to the core of who you really are, you first have to strip away who you are not.

what we do—when, in reality, they are two separate aspects of our lives.

In order to live successful lives, we cannot define ourselves by or try to find our value in what we do in life. What we do includes not only our chosen professions but also all our external qualities. We need to define ourselves and find our worth in who we are on the inside. Identity is not about what's readily visible to casual observers—good looks, stylish clothes, a house in the right neighborhood, professional or personal accomplishments, or even intellect or charisma. Identity is about what God has put deep inside of us, not only our uniqueness as individuals, but also the spiritual realities He has deposited in us as believers. When we perceive those gifts rightly, we draw strength and pursue our destinies based on all He has placed inside of us, not on anything we could gain through human effort.

Perhaps you saw the movie *Gladiator*, which is a phenomenal story of the power of identity. In the movie, Russell Crowe plays Maximus, an outstanding general in the army of the Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius's son, Commodus, expects to succeed his father as emperor, but Aurelius knows Commodus is unfit to rule and chooses Maximus instead. Hearing this news, Commodus flies into a rage and kills his father. He arranges for Maximus to be arrested and killed, and he orders Maximus's farm burned and his family murdered. After this trauma, as Maximus wanders in the desert, a North African slave owner captures him and requires him to work as a gladiator.

Maximus quickly becomes a skilled gladiator, winning victory after victory and becoming popular with the local audience. The people, however, do not know who he is, because he fights in a mask. They only know him as "the Spaniard." Eventually he ends up back in Rome in the fighting ring with Commodus, who has no idea Maximus is still alive.

Commodus begs the Spaniard to identify himself, and when he finally does, Commodus is stunned and the audience in Rome is thrilled. Their hero has returned! Maximus's soldiers rally around him, and Commodus knows his days are numbered. In his jealousy and desperation to retain the throne, he challenges Maximus to a duel. Prior to the match, he stabs Maximus. Despite his wound, Maximus fights on, eventually killing his longtime rival. After Commodus's death, Maximus's stab wound becomes fatal, and he requests with his dying words that the important reforms needed in Rome finally become realities and that the gladiators with whom he was imprisoned be freed.

The reason Maximus was victorious in the end was that he never lost his sense of identity. He went from being a general in the Roman army to being a prisoner, but he did not let that change who he was. He never appropriated the mind-set or the bearing of a prisoner. His "do" changed radically, but his "who" never did.

Many people today believe their identities are in what they do. There are large numbers of people who, if they lost their jobs tomorrow, would suffer a great deal emotionally. They would question their self-worth and their value to the world around them, when in reality nothing about who they are or what they can contribute would change at all. Those things would stand firm; the professional expression of those things would simply be removed.

Perhaps you have heard, as I have, of men whose identities were so tightly tied to their ability to provide for their families that they killed themselves after losing their jobs and not being able to find what they considered appropriate employment. These situations are tragic in every way, and their bottom line is that those who committed suicide never understood how valuable they were, with or without a job. They never separated their *who* from their *do*, and their failure to do so was devastating.

When you know your *who* and are firmly established in your

identity, you can lose your *do* and bounce back to bigger and better “*do*”s. Failure does not keep you down when you know who you really are. Many people seem to believe their *do* makes their *who* possible, but the truth is the other way around: your *who* makes possible everything you do.

I want to encourage you to take a hard look at your life. Examine what you do and ask yourself how it makes you feel. Do you feel important because you are a CEO, a COO, a CFO, or some other executive—or do you feel important because you are you? Do you believe life is worth living as long as you are raising smart, well-mannered children or coaching a winning football team—or is life worth living because of the positive internal resources you can offer the people around you? Are you fulfilled because you’ve earned the respect of your community—or do you feel fulfilled because you have the qualities that earned the respect in the first place?

When you know your *who* and are firmly established in your identity, you can lose your *do* and bounce back to bigger and better “*do*”s.

As you begin peeling the onion of who you are, these questions and others will probably come to mind and will take time and effort to answer. You may have to face some unpleasant realities about how much weight you have been attributing to your *do*, when it rightfully belongs to your *who*. The only way to move toward a better, happier, psychologically healthier life is to start investigating where you really find your identity and then make whatever changes are needed.

Your Identity Is Not Based on Circumstances

Everyone’s life is affected at some point by situations outside of his or her control. When these things happen, many people allow them

to define who they are—whether it's being born without the advantages other people enjoy, the breakup of a family during childhood, a serious accident or injury, the loss of a job and a paycheck, an illness, or a teenage child's bad decisions.

One of the best stories I know of a person who refused to allow circumstances beyond his control to contribute to his identity is about an amazing man whose inventions years ago probably still impact your life today. His story is so inspirational that he has become almost a living symbol of what it means to overcome seemingly insurmountable personal obstacles and achieve success. His name is George Washington Carver, and he is famous for his work as an inventor and for his creativity in finding more than three hundred beneficial uses for the peanut, including mayonnaise, shampoo, nitroglycerine, and axle grease.² At a time when the boll weevil threatened to destroy the economy of the South by wiping out the cotton crop, Carver's inventions inspired struggling farmers to plant and harvest peanuts instead of cotton, arguably saving this entire region of the United States from financial disaster.³ His accomplishments are remarkable not only because of their creative and scientific value, but also because the man overcame his personal history. Against all odds, he persevered with the help of the family who raised him, even though he was not their biological child.

During the Civil War, one-week-old George was kidnapped from the home of his owner, Moses Carver. One of Mr. Carver's employees found the baby and returned him to the Carvers' home. Mr. Carver and his wife took the boy in, raised him, and were determined to provide him with an education.

In those days, schooling was not readily available to African American children, and none of the local schools would admit George as a student. So Mrs. Carver taught George to read and write. Even after the end of slavery, George continued to live with

the Carver family and Mrs. Carver remained his teacher for several years.

Eventually, George was able to go to a school about ten miles from the Carvers' home. He was then accepted at a college in Kansas and planned to attend—until school officials changed their minds about him because of his race. Later, George became the first black student at Iowa State Agricultural College, where he excelled in his studies and received both a bachelor's and a master's degree.

George Washington Carver established himself as a brilliant botanist, teacher, inventor, and administrator. He ran the agriculture department at the esteemed Tuskegee Institute, and under his leadership, the department gained national respect and renown. He became one of America's foremost intellectuals in his day, serving as an advisor to President Theodore Roosevelt. On the international scene, he advised India's leader, Mahatma Gandhi, on issues of agriculture and nutrition.

At the beginning of George's life, nothing suggested he would ever be able to learn or go to school, much less enjoy worldwide esteem. But his curiosity, diligence, and perseverance paid off, and he went from being a slave child to being a globally respected scientist and leader. Of course, his brilliance took him to places he once only dreamed of going and gained him the trust of world leaders and the admiration of generations of Americans. But had the Carver family not cared for him and raised him as their own, his intellect would never have been given a chance to develop and his creativity might not have been channeled in the right direction. The education the family provided gave him the foundation he needed for a life of phenomenal success.

I can imagine that George Washington Carver never forgot he was born a slave. That could have resulted in all sorts of I-factor issues for him—feelings of inferiority to others, feeling he was a victim, anger over his lot in life, or fear of having big dreams. He could

have squandered the opportunities the Carvers gave him, especially after he had endured race-based rejection from several schools. But he didn't. He chose to believe in himself and his abilities, and to take advantage of his opportunities. He did not let obstacles stand in his way, nor did he allow the opinions of others (especially those who denied him entrance to school) to change his estimation of himself. He did not allow the circumstances into which he was born to define his view of himself. In fact, that identity became the fuel of his accomplishments. His *who* was the internal engine that drove everything about his life. When your *who* defines and drives your life, opposition, obstacles, and even unfair treatment are not allowed to become determining factors about who you are.

When Carver died on January 5, 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent this message: "All mankind are the beneficiaries of his discoveries in the field of agricultural chemistry. The things which he achieved in the face of early handicaps will for all time afford an inspiring example to youth everywhere."²⁴ George Washington Carver had a strong I-factor that became the cornerstone of his success because he made the mental and emotional transition from a slave to a son.

Your Identity Is Not Based on What Happened to You

The Bible tells the poignant story about a person who had no idea who he was, no sense of identity, and who lived more like a slave than a son—Mephibosheth, a grandson of Israel's King Saul, a tragic historical figure. Mephibosheth is a powerful picture of someone who did not know who he was and who lived beneath his privilege as a result. We can learn some valuable lessons from his life.

King Saul was King David's predecessor on the throne of Israel. He started out well but ended up a tormented man jealous

of the young David destined to rule after him. When David had the opportunity to kill King Saul, he restrained himself, twice (1 Sam. 24:1–7; 26:7–11). One reason for David’s kindness toward Saul was his friendship with Saul’s son Jonathan. Years after Saul and Jonathan had died, David remembered his friend and asked a question: “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” (2 Sam. 9:1). He discovered that Jonathan had a son who lived in poverty in a place called Lo-Debar, so he sent for him. Their first conversation recorded in 2 Samuel 9:6–8 is remarkable:

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”

Clearly, Mephibosheth had an I-factor problem. There he was, with King David offering to completely restore all his family had lost and to treat him as family by moving him into the palace and including him at the king’s table for every meal. Mephibosheth thought so poorly of himself that he could not even acknowledge David’s grace and favor. All he could focus on was what a wretch he was, in his opinion.

When we hear of a prince living in poverty, viewing himself as “a dead dog,” and being rescued by his father’s friend, we have to wonder how he ended up that way. It goes back many years, to a time when Mephibosheth was very young and Saul’s family members were forced to flee their home (2 Sam. 4:4). A nurse gathered

Mephibosheth in her arms to carry him to safety, but in her haste, she tripped and dropped him, which is how he became crippled. The critical I-factor lessons in Mephibosheth's story are twofold: Anyone can lose his or her sense of identity, even the grandson of a king, but anyone can also recover and regain it. Second, one of the most important aspects of regaining a sense of identity is to deal with what has happened in the past. Bad things do happen to people. Sometimes those things are tragic and completely outside of the victim's control. In those circumstances, individuals can choose to live with the negative consequences of what others have done to them (or allowed to happen to them), or they can choose to overcome.

I am certain Mephibosheth's nurse did not mean to drop him. No doubt, it was an accident. She was trying to help him, but he ended up hurt—permanently—despite her good intentions. Many people, maybe even you, can relate to Mephibosheth's predicament. Perhaps something deeply wounding has happened to you, and it was not your fault. The person who caused the damage may not have intended to hurt you and may feel terrible about it now. But the facts and the consequences of the situation are what they are; you can't change them, but you can change the way you allow them to affect you. What happened to you is external; what you do with it is internal. You have a choice: you can focus on what happened or you can focus on who you are. Who you are has absolutely nothing to do with what has happened to you.

Had Mephibosheth chosen to focus on who he was, he could have experienced restoration much sooner than he did; he lived in poverty in Lo-Debar for way too long. David had a track record of kindness toward Saul's family, and had Mephibosheth simply made the effort to reach out to David, he would not have struggled in deprivation for so long. Had he viewed himself as the royalty that he was instead of as a dead dog, his entire life would have been different.

What happened to Mephibosheth was external, not internal. Although it affected him dramatically, it did not have to change who he was or how he viewed himself. If you have struggled with allowing your past to define you, one of the best things you can do is break free from it. So how do you move beyond the things that have hurt you, handicapped you, or hindered your pursuit of your destiny? Let me offer four observations many people have found helpful: Things happen. Freedom comes from forgiveness. Who you are is much more important than what happened to you. Changing what you can change is important.

Things Happen

Life is not always a bed of roses. Good things do happen to people, but bad things happen too. It's just part of living. Many times, when circumstances are extremely painful or have caused problems for us, we may be tempted to deny them. We may blame our troubles on other things because the real culprits are too painful to deal with. This is especially true for victims of sexual abuse or assault. It can also apply to people injured in car accidents when the other driver was intoxicated, for parents or siblings of people who bring shame or embarrassment to their families, or for hard-working individuals who may end up out of a job due to the sale of a company or other circumstances beyond their control. Many people have these situations and others like them in their pasts. In most cases, these people cannot help what has happened to them. They can only decide that they will not allow these things to define them.

If something in your past truly has put certain limitations on your present circumstances, one of the healthiest things you can do is to accept it as a part of your life's journey but refuse to see it as the defining moment of your life. You are not the product of the things that have happened to you. You're bigger and better than that.

Freedom Comes from Forgiveness

I know many people who have had negative experiences in their lives. Some of them view themselves as victims who will never heal, and some see themselves as overcomers. Often, what makes the difference between the two mind-sets is whether people choose to forgive those who hurt or offended them.

You will find more detail about forgiveness later in the book, but for now I simply want to encourage you to take the most important step in your healing journey—forgive. You may need to forgive the person or people involved in the circumstances that hurt you. In some cases, you may also need to forgive yourself for blaming others when you could have taken responsibility for yourself or for lingering in your pain when you had opportunities to be healed. As one version of an anonymous old saying goes, “Harboring unforgiveness is like taking a drink of poison and hoping it will kill somebody else.” Not being willing to forgive will keep you in bondage to your past and to the people involved in your previous pain; it will form an invisible bond that connects you to that situation and all its negativity.

No matter who was involved in the tragic or unfortunate things that have happened in your past or what their specific roles were, the only way to set yourself free from them is to forgive them. You'll be amazed at the freedom, strength, and new perspectives on life that will come to you when you do.

Who You Are Is Much More Important than What Happened to You

I am convinced that Mephibosheth's biggest problem was obsessing about what happened to him instead of thinking about who he was and what he could become. He seems to have fixed his gaze on what he could not do instead of what he could do.

As you move forward in your life, let me encourage you to

stay focused on your identity, not on the incidents that have happened in the past. If you will put past events behind you and build up who you are on the inside, you'll soon find yourself with a whole new outlook on life. You will gain the ability to dream again and to develop the motivation to go after your destiny like never before.

When you wake up every morning and feel a familiar physical or emotional pain from some previous trauma, you have a decision to make. You can say something like, "Oh, there's that pain again. I feel it every single day. I remember when it happened . . . I'll never get over it." Or you can say, "There's that pain again. I feel it, but it doesn't define me. I'm not a victim of the circumstance that caused that wound. I forgive the people involved in it. I am determined to move beyond it. I am bigger than my past and stronger than anything that would try to hold me back."

Changing What You Can Change Is Important

Based on what we know about Mephibosheth's story, one of his failures is he never tried to better himself. He allowed himself to live in Lo-Debar to the point that the spirit of Lo-Debar seeped into his very being and became part of who he was. He saw himself as no better than a dead dog, when he was actually a prince! This is what happens to people who wallow in their pasts; they lose their desire and ultimately their ability to change. If you are in this situation, I pray you will take action and begin to look at what can be different. It may be something extremely small, but small beginnings are very important.

Think about an athlete who suffers an injury during a ballgame. Let's say that athlete once dreamed of playing professional sports because of his love for baseball, football, or basketball. If the injury is debilitating, he may not be able to play on the professional level, but he could pursue sports broadcasting, sports medicine,

sports marketing, employment in the front office of a major league team, or he could strive to be a sports agent. If the injury is not permanent and he allows himself to laze around in bed instead of doing the work his recovery requires, he could end up permanently incapacitated. But if he chooses to work on getting better every day, he could regain his health and strength and find ways to participate in the sport he loves, even if he cannot actively participate on the field or on the court.

In many situations, people allow themselves to become stuck in their pain or in the disappointment that they can no longer do what they've always wanted to do. But that does not mean they cannot do anything at all. The key to moving forward in life is to do what we can do and to change our circumstances in every possible way instead of letting them overcome us and shut us down.

All Those Good Things Are for You!

As I mentioned earlier, Mephibosheth is a picture of so many people who are not established in their identities. One way to know when someone is struggling with this issue is when he or she looks at other people and thinks, *They will have the breakthroughs they need. Everything will turn out fine for their families. Something great is going to happen for them, but not for me.* This is the mentality of people who do not know their true worth, not the viewpoint of those who know who they really are. Perhaps you have even found yourself thinking this way.

Mephibosheth's story applies today to people whose negative I-factor issues have caused them to miss out on the very best life can offer them. If your past has caused you to believe certain things that simply are not true about your identity, you can have a fresh start and you can go on to have a great life full of good things. All you have to do is realize that your *who* is not your *do*. Whether

your *do* is based on something you did to yourself (such as making an unwise decision) or something someone else did to you (such as hurting you, cheating you out of something you had earned, betraying you, or abandoning you) it's in the past. You don't have to take it into your future.

As you look ahead, I hope you will believe that greatness awaits you. Your past does not have to stand between you and your success. You don't have to carry your past with you or even look back and try to remember it. You can move forward without the baggage of the days behind you and enter into the amazing days ahead of you with the freedom and strength that come from knowing who you are and living from that core.

Internal Building Blocks

- The process of discovering your personal identity—your own assessment of who you are and why you are significant—is one of the most rewarding journeys you will ever take. It's like peeling an onion. You remove the layers of expectation, frustration, and disappointment from your life, and you discover who you really are.
- Trying to please or impress other people or to live up to their expectations instead of living out of your true identity is exhausting and frustrating. The only ticket to real success is to be who you really are.
- Your identity is based on who you are, not on what you do.
- Your past does not define you, nor does it have to determine your present or your future.
- There are at least four ways to break free from your past. First, realize that things happen, and they can and must be dealt with in healthy ways. Second, understand that forgiveness leads to freedom. Third, realize that who you are is much more important

IT'S TIME TO PEEL THE ONION

than what happens to you. And fourth, in any situation, it's important to be proactive and change what you can change.

Strengthening Your I-Factor

1. What are some of the layers you need to peel back in order to reveal your true identity?
2. How would you define your true identity?
3. Have you ever worked hard to please someone or live up to his or her expectations? Did that situation allow you to express your true identity, and was it ultimately good for you?
4. What is the most valuable discovery you have ever made in finding out who you really are?
5. One of the ways to break free from your past is to realize that who you are is much more important than what has happened to you. In your life, what has happened that has become so big that it now overshadows who you are? How might you change the way you think about yourself and your true identity in order to put that situation in proper perspective?

The Best-Kept Secret of Sustained Success

The toughest thing about success is that you've got to keep on being a success.

—IRVING BERLIN

SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO TO reach the pinnacle of success, but they know little about how to stay at the top of their game once they get there. They may enjoy achievements and acclaim for a while, but then something happens and they lose their position. Almost always, they fall because of something internal, some kind of I-factor issue. I realize that in certain situations, such as a hostile takeover when the CEO of a company loses his or her job, other people may be responsible for someone's downfall. But most of the time, people who reach a level of success and cannot maintain it have only themselves to blame.

Some people fail to succeed; others succeed only to then become very successful at failure. In some ways, the internal dynamics needed to reach a point of success are different from those required to stay successful. Reaching a goal often takes one set of skills and personal resources, while living at that new level takes other skills. For example, for some people, ambition and determination

are the top-priority attitudes while they are seeking success. Once they reach the success for which they've labored, ambition fades or gets redirected because it's no longer needed in the way it once was. Then responsibility takes over, and the pressures of responsibility are different from the pressures of ambition. That's why some people seem to attain success quickly and then lose it just as speedily.

Whenever a person has a weak or faulty I-factor, long-term and sustained success will be difficult. But I truly believe anyone can achieve and sustain success if his or her I-factor is strong and healthy. No matter what an individual's personal definition of *success* is, he or she can get there and stay there, as long as the I-factor is right.

Reaching a goal often takes one set of skills and personal resources, while living at that new level takes other skills.

Success Isn't Necessarily Permanent

Xerxes I of Persia
Anna Nicole Smith
Lance Armstrong
Jimmy Swaggart
Leona Helmsley

These people are seemingly as different as they can be, but they all have one thing in common: they suffered in life because of a personal weakness that took them from the pinnacle of success to total disgrace. In each situation, the specific contributing element to the downfall differed, but it was something related to the I-factor.

The ancient King Xerxes I of Persia allowed his ego to cause him to underestimate a powerful Greek army that eventually defeated him. Anna Nicole Smith's hunger for attention, glamour,

and wealth left her empty and miserable; ultimately she died of a drug overdose. Lance Armstrong's quest for dominance and fame caused him to cheat by using illegal substances. Jimmy Swaggart's inability to control his lust led to his being defrocked and losing what was once a popular ministry. Leona Helmsley's greed and arrogance ended with a seven-million-dollar fine and eighteen months in prison.

These individuals reached great heights of success and then fell, but the same dynamics that toppled them are the basic reasons why other, less well-known people have the potential to succeed, yet never do. These people never reach positions of visibility and influence, never see their stories in the news. They suffer in obscurity, well aware of their potential, but unable to reach it—and often unable to figure out why.

You may struggle to identify with a Persian king, a seemingly successful model and actress, an elite athlete, a popular televangelist, or a ruthless businesswoman, but you still know what I mean when I talk about people who yearn for success and significance, only to sabotage themselves time and time again. Maybe that's exactly what's happening to you. There seems to be no reason you cannot live the life you long for, yet every time you start to pursue your purpose, you get derailed. After a while, you recognize this is happening repeatedly. You are a person of dreams and destiny, but you wrestle with the reality that you simply cannot get where you want to go. Be encouraged: this chapter will help you identify, understand, and solve the problem, and break through the barriers that have blocked you from the greatness you were born to enjoy.

A King Sets Himself Up for a Fall

People have tumbled from positions of prominence to the depths of obscurity for centuries. Influential voices have been silenced

because they got caught up in corruption; people of certain socio-economic status have lost their wealth; something has humbled a haughty socialite or an arrogant leader. It's what happened to the first king of the nation of Israel, a thirty-year-old man named Saul. King Saul was known early in his reign for being tall and handsome and was regarded later as a shrewd and victorious military leader. Saul preceded David, and like David, King Saul experienced remarkable success—to a point.

Soon after Samuel, the priest and prophet, anointed Saul as king, he gave Saul a series of instructions concerning things he needed to do as the nation's new leader. One of them was, "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do" (1 Sam. 10:8).

Saul partially honored Samuel's request. He did go to Gilgal, where he would fight an important battle against the Philistines, but when Samuel did not arrive seven days later, Saul took matters into his own hands.

Remember, Samuel was a prophet and the priest in Israel at the time. He was God's emissary in this situation; he alone was qualified to sacrifice the offerings. He had promised to make the offerings at Gilgal, as was fitting for him to do. The longer Saul waited for Samuel, the more frightened his army became. By the seventh day, they began abandoning him. So Saul usurped Samuel's responsibility and privilege and presented the offerings himself, instead of continuing to wait for Samuel, the proper person to offer the sacrifices.

Just as Saul finished with the offerings, Samuel arrived. Surprised that the offerings had already been made, he asked Saul, "What have you done?" (1 Sam. 13:11).

Saul told Samuel that when he realized his men were leaving

and Samuel had not shown up at the time he promised to be there and the Philistine army was gathering against his forces, he knew his army would soon be under attack. When he saw these circumstances aligning against him and did not know where Samuel was, he said he “felt compelled to offer the burnt offering” (v. 12).

Samuel’s response was both stern and sad:

“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command.” (vv. 13–14)

Almost as quickly as God elevated Saul to the highest position in the land, He spoke forth his downfall through Samuel. As quickly as Saul gained God’s favor, he lost it. When God chose Saul as king, he went from anonymity to royalty. With his actions at Gilgal, he forfeited everything God had for him. He basically lost his destiny, failing to maintain his position of success for the long term because he demonstrated six I-factor flaws: he had a bad habit of making excuses, he was impatient, he was disobedient, he compared himself to another and allowed himself to become jealous, he was fearful, and he was proud. Even though Saul lived centuries ago, these same weaknesses, in some form or another—sometimes alone and sometimes in conjunction with one another—comprise the basis of almost every I-factor problem that people struggle with today.

Saul’s I-Factor Problems

Saul’s first personal flaw was his lack of willingness to take responsibility for himself, causing him to make excuses and blame others.

We see this when Samuel confronts him after realizing he has offered the sacrifices himself, instead of waiting on Samuel. Instead of owning his offense, Saul says, basically, “Well, see, it wasn’t really about me. It was my men. They were so scared of the Philistines and they started leaving.”

At Gilgal, Saul had three thousand troops, but he also had God on his side. God chose him as a leader. God anointed him. God was with him. If every one of the men had left, God still would have been with him. And God plus anyone is always a majority. I would rather have God on my side and no one else than three thousand frail human beings, wouldn’t you? All we have to do is think about the story of Gideon to realize that numbers are unimportant when God is with a leader (Judg. 7). But Saul did not think about that.

Based on the certainty that God was with Israel’s army, Saul could have rallied his troops and inspired them by his own faith and patience to wait for Samuel, but he did not. As their leader, keeping his men calm, focused, and strong was part of his responsibility. He did not do it. He let their leaving frighten him, he allowed them to go, and then he blamed them for his sin—doing what only the priest was allowed to do.

Saul’s second I-factor problem was that he lacked patience. Saul was not impatient because of a bad temper; he lost his patience in this situation because of his perspective. If we look back at 1 Samuel 10:8, we see that Samuel promised to be in Gilgal after seven days—not at noon on the seventh day, not at 4:00 p.m., not at any specific time. He told Saul which day he would arrive, not which hour. The seventh day was not complete when Saul took the inappropriate initiative of making the offerings. Samuel did come—just as Saul completed the offerings.

The third weakness in Saul’s I-factor was his disobedience to God. Before I go further, let me say this: God is a God of second chances, sometimes even third and fourth chances. Whenever we

fail or fall short of what He has called us to do, He is gracious to allow us to try again—because He wants us to succeed. Saul was not only irresponsible and impatient at Gilgal, he was also disobedient because he knew he was not supposed to offer the sacrifices; he knew that in God’s order, only the priest could perform such rituals.

In spite of Saul’s failings and foolishness at Gilgal, God gave him another chance. In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel speaks to Saul on God’s behalf and tells him to execute God’s punishment on the Amalekites. This army had already launched a major attack against Israel (Ex. 17), and now God was ready to deal with them. The instruction was clear and firm: “Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” (1 Sam. 15:3). Based on these directions, Saul should have known exactly what to do.

But he did not do it. Instead, he spared the life of the Amalekites’ king Agag “and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely” (v. 9). There was no doubt about it. Saul disobeyed God’s orders.

The reason God wanted the Amalekites annihilated was that He knew a remnant of the enemy would rebuild and grow and eventually return to attack Israel again, which is exactly what happened. God meant business when He directed Saul to obliterate the Amalekites, but Saul did not take Him seriously. Samuel, however, did fear the Lord and in the end, he put Agag to death because he understood the importance of obedience (vv. 32–33).

Immediately after Saul’s disobedience regarding the Amalekites, God tells Samuel that He has chosen a new king (1 Sam. 16:1), a young man named David who would ultimately become Israel’s best-known ruler. After Samuel anointed David king, the Bible tells us “the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David” (v. 13). In

the next verse, we read, “Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him” (v. 14). Why did God send an evil spirit to harass Saul? Because of his foolishness, the sins he committed at Gilgal, and his failure to follow God’s instructions about the Amalekites. But why was he foolish and sinful? Because he neglected to deal with the personal weaknesses that eventually destroyed him.

In the midst of Saul’s torment, his attendants suggested they find someone who could play beautiful music to soothe him. Saul agreed, and one of the servants sent for David, calling him “a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him” (v. 18). Saul, of course, had no idea that God had chosen David and that Samuel had anointed David to become Israel’s next king.

David’s music did indeed calm Saul, and David quickly gained Saul’s favor. David killed the Philistine giant, Goliath, and became a local hero for military victories that exceeded Saul’s. The king promoted David to a high rank in his army and gave his daughter to David in marriage. Over time, though, Saul grew jealous of David and compared himself to him. This was his fourth I-factor flaw.

As his fifth I-factor flaw, Saul became afraid of David because he knew the presence of the Lord had left him and could tell that God’s presence and favor were upon David (1 Sam. 18:12). In addition, he was too proud to acknowledge David’s victories or to honor David for them—his sixth I-factor weakness. Eventually, as Saul’s madness, jealousy, fear, and pride spun out of control, he tried to kill David. David fled but at one point found himself with his army in a cave, and Saul entered the cave to relieve himself (1 Sam. 24:3). David got close enough to Saul to kill him, but chose not to, saying, “The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the

LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him" (v. 6). David had another chance to kill Saul, and again decided against it (1 Sam. 26:6–11).

From the time he was thirty years old, Saul was destined for greatness. God saw something promising in him, or He would not have chosen him as king. Saul ascended to the highest position in Israel, and God gave him chance after chance to handle himself well. Throughout his reign, he repeatedly refused to deal with his I-factor issues—irresponsibility, impatience, disobedience, fear, jealousy, and pride. That stubbornness and lack of humility led him to years of torment and ultimately to such ongoing misery that he took his own life (1 Sam. 31:4).

One of the saddest aspects of Saul's story is that he could have succeeded. Each of Saul's faults and their consequences could have been avoided had he simply dealt with his I-factor. Had he been willing to take responsibility instead of make excuses, he could have become a strong leader instead of a tragic figure. Had he exercised patience at Gilgal, he could have been the cornerstone of a lasting reign in Israel. God told Saul that He would have "established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure" (1 Sam. 13:13–14).

Had Saul been obedient to wipe out the Amalekites, the nation of Israel would not have suffered subsequent attacks from them, nor would David have had to fight them (1 Sam. 27:8; 30:1–18). In addition, Saul would not have endured the personal consequences of disobedience to God. Instead of comparing himself with David and feeling inferior to him, Saul could have celebrated David as a promising young leader and shared in David's ultimate successes. Instead, he spent the last years of his life running in fear from a man who only showed him mercy and did him good. Instead of allowing his pride to destroy him, Saul could have been a humble, righteous king.

A Sad Summary of Saul's Life

In one of my favorite books, *A Tale of Three Kings*, Gene Edwards powerfully summarized Saul's strengths and weaknesses:

What kind of man was Saul? Who was this one who made himself David's enemy? Anointed of God. Deliverer of Israel. And yet remembered mostly for his madness.

Forget the bad press. Forget the stinging reviews. Forget his reputation. Look at the facts. Saul was one of the greatest figures of human history. He was a farm boy, a real country kid. He was tall, good-looking, and well-liked.

He was baptized into the Spirit of God.

He also came from a good family; that is, in his lineage were some of the great historical figures of all mankind. Abraham, Israel, Moses, these were his ancestors. . . .

Saul united a people and founded a kingdom. Few men have ever done that. He created an army out of thin air. He won battles in the power of God, defeated the enemy again and again, as few men ever have. . . . Furthermore, he was a prophet. The Spirit came on him in power and authority. He did and said unprecedented things and it was all by the power of the Spirit resting on him.

He was everything [people] today are seeking to be . . . empowered with the Holy Spirit . . . able to do the impossible . . . for God.

He was also eaten with jealousy, capable of murder and willing to live in spiritual darkness. . . .

There is a vast difference between the outward clothing of the Spirit's power and the inward filling of the Spirit's life. In the first, despite the power, the hidden man of the heart may remain unchanged. In the latter, that monster is dealt with.¹

How Not to Be Like Saul

So many people today struggle with the same issues that caused Saul to lose his position and his destiny. If we are honest, I think all of us can remember times we have been irresponsible, impatient, or disobedient. We can also think of situations in which we have been afraid, compared ourselves with others and become jealous of them, and walked in pride instead of humility. Some people manage these things better than others. Some manage most of them well, but find themselves in a seemingly constant battle with another. For example, some people are not impatient, but they are irresponsible. Others are not easily jealous of others, but they do battle fear in every situation they face.

The key to sustained success is to resolve all our I-factor issues as quickly as we can, as soon as we recognize them. Otherwise, like Saul, we can be people of tremendous potential and promise, but lose everything. Thankfully, there are some ways we can begin to deal with I-factor issues we may have in common with Saul. Our stories can be accounts of increasing strength and victory, not continual weakness and defeat.

Become Responsible

Being irresponsible is easy. Taking responsibility is a bit more difficult, but it is vital to long-term success. If you struggle with irresponsibility, let me encourage you to look for areas where you can start small. For example, take responsibility for managing your time. Don't rely on a spouse or a roommate to wake you up each morning; set your own wake time on your alarm clock or electronic device. In addition, take responsibility for your health by making healthy food choices, disciplining yourself to exercise, and keeping doctor's appointments as recommended. These are simple ways to grow in your capacity to be responsible. Once you

learn to take responsibility, it will become a stepping-stone to success.

Become Patient

I have seen so many people sabotage their own success simply because they were not willing to wait. When you are moving toward a new level of greatness, you can easily become excited and get ahead of yourself. But often, success is a matter of timing. Just because something does not happen when you want it to does not mean it will never happen at all. If you'll discipline yourself to be patient as your journey to success unfolds, you will learn many valuable lessons along the way. There's a reason for the old sayings, "Patience is a virtue" and "Good things come to those who wait." They're true!

Become Obedient

Saul's biggest mistake was his disobedience to the Lord. Throughout Scripture, there is a principle that says obedience leads to blessing. As long as Saul obeyed God, he enjoyed God's blessing. When he stopped, things fell apart. That same pattern is still in effect today and applies to you and me. I understand obedience is not always easy, but it's important to remember God will always lead you in the best possible way to the best possible results, even if you don't like or understand the process. Anytime He asks for your obedience, you can be sure it's for your good.

Resist Fear

The older Saul got, the more fearful he became. His fears sucked the greatness out of him. The late Nelson Mandela said, "The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."² It's important to understand that feeling afraid is

normal; it's part of life. But allowing fear to control us, to override our sensibilities, to keep us from doing what we know we should do, or to cause us to hold back when we need to move forward is a problem. Few emotions will block success and shut down a journey to greatness like fear—fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of what other people will think, fear of the future, or any of the other fears that so often plague humanity. In your life, fear will raise its ugly head from time to time; your job is to face it and overcome it.

Resist Comparison and Jealousy

People with a weak I-factor easily fall into comparison and jealousy. Too often, they look to see how what they are doing stacks up to what others are doing. This “doing” may be anything from people's appearances and what clothes they wear, to the cars they drive, to whether or not they are married, to their positions at work, to their athletic abilities, or to their abilities to keep a clean house. Jealousy and comparison have their roots in selfishness and pride, and there is no end to the things a jealous person will find to envy about others.

Mature people who are secure in who they are and who have strong I-factors are able to honor and enjoy the successes of others. They are able to compliment others and encourage them to go after their dreams and fulfill their potential. They can do these things without a twinge of jealousy and without comparing themselves to other people or comparing their possessions to others' belongings. This is because they know who they are, their identities are established, and they have conquered selfishness and pride. Because of their inner strength, they see things others would envy and view them as causes to celebrate those who have achieved or attained them.

Practice Humility

The English preacher Charles Spurgeon described humility this way: to be humble is “to make a right estimate of oneself.”³ I like this definition because many people have been taught that humility means not standing up for oneself, choosing weakness over strength, or becoming a doormat. None of these is true. Genuine humility requires an accurate assessment of yourself, an honest evaluation of both your strengths and your weaknesses. It also requires a respectful expression of who you really are—not a suppression of your true self in an effort to please or defer to someone else for the sake of keeping peace or being viewed as polite. To practice humility is not to refuse to act or to keep your mouth shut, but to act and speak wisely, respectfully, and truthfully whenever a situation calls for it.

A Tale of Two Kings

When I think of Saul, I also think of two modern-day men, also clearly called and anointed of God, whose outward circumstances were not like Saul’s, but whose inner struggles took them down. One chose not to be like Saul, while the other unfortunately followed some of Saul’s examples. These men ended up with vastly different results, which is why I call the story of these two influential Christian leaders “A Tale of Two Kings.”

In the 1970s and ’80s, two of the most popular and highly rated televangelists in the world were Jim Bakker and his wife, Tammy Faye. If ever there had been a Christian media king up to that point in history, Jim Bakker was it, and he and Tammy Faye epitomized everything the word *televangelist* has come to mean. They were charismatic in their personalities and anointed in their ministry, and they enjoyed the financial fruit of their calling. Jim and Tammy Faye came across as compassionate people of God with a gift for leading people to salvation.

But behind the scenes, what appeared to be a prosperous media ministry was struggling financially. As the result of an investigation by the *Charlotte Observer* newspaper, Jim faced criminal charges based on illegal fund-raising activities. In addition, he was involved in a sexual scandal at the same time his ministry was unraveling. In 1988, Jim was convicted on fifteen counts of wire fraud, eight counts of mail fraud, and one count of conspiracy. He was sentenced to forty-five years in prison and fined \$500,000. In 1991, an appellate court voided the sentence and the fine and sent the case to a new hearing. Tammy Faye divorced Jim in 1992, and he was released from prison in December 1994.

Jim had nothing when he left prison, but thanks to the kindness of the Billy Graham family, he slowly began to rebuild his life—including dealing with his I-factor issues, which are clear in his book *I Was Wrong*.⁴ As of this writing, Jim is happily married to his lovely wife, Lori, and they are serving God together and blessing the body of Christ in powerful ways. Jim's story could have easily ended in tragedy and degradation, but it didn't. He was humble enough to confront his weaknesses, repent of his sins, and ask God to restore his life. His story of restoration is an amazing testimony to what God can do when a person settles the I-factor issues that once ensnared him or her.

The second man I want to mention, though I will refrain from naming him, was once a leading televangelist. He also pastored a large church in one of America's biggest cities. In his world, he, too, was viewed as a ministry king at one time. He appeared to be a great man of God and preached powerfully from the pulpit. Like Jim Bakker, he accumulated wealth and influence, and built a Christian media empire. But under the surface, something was not right. He eventually settled two lawsuits that indicated serious misconduct—one based on allegations of sexual wrongdoing and one based on allegations of running a Ponzi scheme. To my

knowledge, this man has never publicly taken responsibility for his actions nor repented for the damage those actions have done. To the best of my knowledge, this man now ministers to a fraction of the audience who once listened to him with such respect and operates a church that is only a shell of what it once was.

These are two men with fairly similar backgrounds, both gifted ministers trying to serve God. Both of them ran into trouble because of I-factor issues they did not confront. One eventually did confront the issues and went on to lead a beautifully restored life. The other one, well, he still preaches to a few people.

The Secret to Success Is in the Mirror

I hope the stories of Saul and the two modern-day kings have helped you understand how dangerous the failure to resolve I-factor problems can be. When a person achieves a level of success, that success is not guaranteed to last. It can only be sustained if a person is willing to work at it. While there are certain external duties that must be fulfilled in order to stay successful, the most important obligations are internal. They include stepping up to the responsibilities our roles require, managing the negative emotions mentioned in this chapter, such as impatience, fear, jealousy, and ones not specifically addressed yet, such as greed and pride. They also include being humble before God and living a lifestyle of obedience to Him.

I believe God has tremendous success in store for you—more than you could ever ask for or imagine (Eph. 3:20). Once you attain it, I believe He wants you to not only sustain it, but also grow in it. The key is to deal with the I-factor issues you currently see in yourself and the ones that you may become aware of as time goes on.

Internal Building Blocks

- The internal dynamics you need to achieve a certain level of success are different in some ways from those required to maintain that success long term.
- With a weak or faulty I-factor, long-term success will be a challenge, but with a strong, healthy I-factor, no matter how you define success, you can get there and stay there.
- Common I-factor problems include an inflated ego and arrogance (King Xerxes I); a hunger for attention, affirmation, wealth, or beauty (Anna Nicole Smith); the need for fame or dominance in a particular area (Lance Armstrong); the failure to manage sexuality in a healthy way (Jimmy Swaggart); and greed (Leona Helmsley).
- An I-factor weakness must be dealt with or it can lead to a person's ultimate downfall.
- The I-factor problems Saul had are still problems for people today. They include: failure to take responsibility, impatience, disobedience, fear, jealousy, and pride. You can strengthen your I-factor by dealing with these weaknesses if you recognize them in your life.

Strengthening Your I-Factor

1. Why are the tools needed to maintain success different from those needed to achieve success?
2. Have you noticed in yourself any of the I-factor weaknesses mentioned in this chapter? If so, which ones?
3. How can you improve in the areas where your I-factor is faulty or unhealthy?

THE I-FACTOR

4. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 (not good) to 10 (excellent) in the following areas:

Responsibility

Patience

Obedience to God

Courage instead of fear

Security instead of a tendency toward jealousy

Humility

5. Let me encourage you to dream and look ahead for a moment. When you achieve the greatness you believe you were created for, what safeguards might you need to put in place in order to sustain it?

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